

# critical digest

Vol. II No. 41

July 31, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

## Daily Reviewers Rate First "Festival" Play

Parisienne-Fulton, 7/24/50. Few critics found kind words for first two weeks presentation of Festival Theatre. Ashley Duke's adaptation of Henri Becque's French farce was blasted as dated, lacking in wit and substance by every reviewer. While most praised fine stylized acting and direction of Faye Emerson, Romney Brent, Helmut Dantine, Francis Lederer and director Sam Wanamaker, Sylvester, News, couldn't agree. He thought play, based on one lame joke, explains why the French are a third rate power today. Critic advised Miss Emerson to stop looking in the audience for her friends. He didn't mention the actors, for he felt they were trying to portray jackasses, not humans. Coleman, Mirror, wished the scripts picked for the entire series could have been more rewarding. Bron, Variety, considered the thin, frothy confection passable for an evening's entertainment. While Corby, Brooklyn Eagle, thought it might have a certain charm to select audiences.

## Weekly Critics Comment on Arena's Double Bill

The Medium and The Telephone-Arena, Hotel Edison, 7/19/50. Trade paper critics joined in raves for theatre-in-the-round production of Menotti double bill. Francis, Billboard, and Herm, Variety, billed it as top melodrama. Former was enthralled by Zelma George, while latter didn't think The Telephone was done very well. Walker, News columnist, backed up this opinion. He considers curtain raiser a piece of unnecessary trash. Daily Worker music critic complained about the seats, the prices, and the unsocial Victorian outlook of the composer, though he praised cast and production. Bill has been extended through September.

## Shows That Closed

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/18/50-7/29/50. William Inge's play drew mixed notices, rating 16 pro votes of 30 critics tabulated. Sincerity and honesty of his script was noted. Sidney Blackmer and Shirley Booth drew raves and many awards. Blackmer was succeeded by Wallace Ford in the final month of the run.

## Summer Theatre Trvouts

Laurine Schwan's Happier Harvest, produced at Putnam County, N.Y. Playhouse met with favor of Rice, Post. It is literate and doesn't follow the patterns of usual summer fare. Jill Miller's perfect staging helped put over the melodrama. But Stern, Show Business, thought the play was incoherent, unjustified and awkward...Arthur Macrae's Traveler's Joy, featuring Gertrude Lawrence and Dennis King, debuted at Falmouth, Massachusetts Playhouse. Dias, Variety, called it a bright, chipper farce without a shred of importance...Within A Glass Bell, William Marchant's new play tried out at Westport, Connecticut Playhouse was given a ticket to Broadway by Elem, Variety. He thinks drama about New York life should win support on content and distinction of performances by Mildred Dunnock, Don Hammer and Josephine Brown.

## Critical Notes

NBC will broadcast four Shakespeare plays starring John Barrymore starting Thursday, August 3, at 8:00 P.M. Roles were recorded in 1937...Al Goodman has been signed by NBC for a disc jockey show...ANTA will have a half hour TV variety show in the fall...Saratoga Summer Theatre is promoted via a weekly 15 minute interview program on WRGB-TV...ABC Pulitzer Prize Theatre and CBS-TV Ford Theatre will both be heard on Fridays at 9:00 P.M...ABC drama "I Cover Times Square" will feature TV drama of adventures of Broadway columnist.

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' The Green Room Department '  
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**COLEMAN'S CRITIQUE...**Reviewers who call themselves critics are presumptuous, Coleman, Mirror, said on WNBC Critic's Corner. He views his job as reporting, and he doesn't see why reviews cannot make their points with consideration for others. If he doesn't like a performance or production he just doesn't press the issue.

**AD SPACE...**Rates for ads on ship tattooed on Myron McCormick's stomach in South Pacific are quoted at \$50 per performance for products with less than five letters, \$5 extra for grinds, reports Lyons, Post.

**TV INVADERS...**If TV snatches legitimate theatres at the current rate for any length of time, N.Y. theatre goers may only have to go to five new shows per season, predicts Sylvester, News. With just one or two dozen theatres left, long runs would be in fashion. It would be difficult to obtain a house to play a new show.

**CRITIC'S MAIL...**A new tone of assault is noted in the mail received by Watts, Post. Irate correspondents insist that critics who disagree with them should beat their breasts in shame and loudly confess their sins. Watts cannot understand why the readers want to introduce the technique of the purge trial to American criticism.

**NO BOOBS...**"Broadway is silly if it thinks people from out of town are hayseeds," Chapman, News, told the Des Moines Advertising Club. Comment was prompted by reference to his feud with Peep Show, which he still claims is an embarrassingly dirty show.

**IN THE ACT...**Questions popped at Garland, Journal American, in his lecture tour are always the same. The young folks want to know how to become a drama critic, while the older listeners want to know how much influence the first string critics actually have on incoming shows.

**COLD WAR...**Anti-Americanism of Soviet propagandists is evident in plays produced throughout Russia, writes Ernest Simmons in New Republic. Five hundred Soviet theatres produced Simonov's Russian Question which was aimed at the venal American press and the money madness of Americans.

**"PASSION" TOWN...**The most peaceful town in Europe is Oberammergau, Germany, scene of the passion play. Wilson, Post, stopped off for a night on his tour. He found the townspeople, who take part in the eight hour pageant, all trying to be good and kind. Wilson didn't report on the play.

**MACBETH COMICS...**Seaboard Publishers, Inc., attempt to put Shakespeare plays in comic book form, hasn't met with the favor of Brown, SRL. Though he thinks publisher John W. Griffin is probably an utterly sincere man, he had only words of scorn for the idea. "Perhaps one of the reasons so many people have been left uneducated by their educations," he concluded, "is because everything is made too easy for them."

**ROAD NOT DEAD...**Recordings of current plays has revived interest in the theatre-out-of-town. David Knapp of Decca Records told Coleman, Mirror. Producers are anxious to have their shows waxed, because it brings them mail orders for tickets from all over the country. He hopes other elements of the theatre will follow his company's lead to revive road tours.

**RANDOM ITEMS...**George Jean Nathan is spending much of his vacation time attending ball games...British Equity has invited critics to become members of the actors union...Powers Moulton, N.Y. News copy desk man, will see his newspaper comedy "Sky High" tried out at several Vermont playhouses this summer. Stage directions in a play written by a drama critic note that only one actress in America can handle a specific part, whispers Lyons, Post. The sole line of dialogue is "Ah".

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\* British Criticism Conference \*

"Conference on Dramatic Criticism" held recently at Stratford-on-Avon explored the role of the critic. It is not the critic's job to know why a thing is good or bad, believes Phillip Hope-Wallace. He thinks it is sufficient to know that it is good or bad. Criticism is opinion and thus subject to no formal rules, said T.C. Kemp. While C.B. Purdon looks on criticism as a technical and moral job. The critic is concerned with the performance and with the valuation of the play and its performance.

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\* Summer Theatres \*

Rewritten version of Mr. Barry's Etchings makes a much better play than the recent Broadway flop, in the opinion of Coleman, Mirror, who saw new production of Archer-Bullock play at Spring Lake, New Jersey. Critic recommended that talent scouts look at Marion Wilson, Tom Reynolds, and Robert Rayhill...Burgess Meredith is the latest of a long line of stars to play Elwood Dowd in Harvey. He played at Princeton, New Jersey. Coleman thought his portrayal was interesting and effective. ...Music Circus revival of Bloomer Girl at Lambertville, New Jersey was thoroughly entertaining, said Bundy, Billboard. She gave top credit to good staging by Glenn Jordan.

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\* Interview Round Up \*

GBS...Making his 94th birthday, Shaw turned out a new play in seven days. He is also planning the movie version of Androcles and the Lion to be produced by Pascal. GBS told reporters that he would certainly not mark his birthday by any ceremony. Shaw Society of America has just been formed.

LOIS SCHENCK...Actress-President of "Shoe Shine Girls, Inc." has been very successful with both her new corporation and her landing of acting jobs, she said on WPIX Little Old New York. Though she has 25 young actresses now signed to shine shoes at conventions, she is always looking for new girls.

JOSHUA LOGAN...Director of Mister Roberts rehearsed the London company on the squash court of the Queen Elizabeth, reports fellow passenger, Sullivan, News. Logan said that the Lord Chamberlain of London was very nice in requesting that some of the speech of the play be edited. But they couldn't comply with his demands.

NORMAN SHELLEY...Actor who plays Nana, the dog, in Peter Pan turned up on WNET Wendy Barrie plugging the ASPCA Building Fund project. Animal hospital of group had been located at Manhattan Beach, but government has reclaimed area.

ZACHARY SCOTT...Star of Blind Alley, now making Subway Circuit Tour, made a familiar promise to WNBC Mary Margaret McBride. He will send her a real Virginia ham if she promotes his show. But 18 other former guests have promised to send her country hams. Not one has ever arrived.

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\* News & Notes \*

Off Broadway Theatre Association has been disbanded...The second Show of the Month Club bus group will attend the Lambertville, New Jersey Playhouse...Variety reports Off Broadway groups doing very badly...Miami night clubs will stage theatre-in-the-round-plays next season.



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 ' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '
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Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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|------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. NY Times                  | 11. Newark News         | 21. Catholic World   |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune         | 12. Women's Wear Daily  | 22. Commonweal       |
| 3. NY News                   | 13. Daily Worker        | 23. Cue              |
| 4. NY Mirror                 | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci. Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (PM, Star)     | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. St. Review Lit.  |
| 6. NY Post                   | 16. George Jean Nathan  | 26. Newsweek         |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse)        | 17. Morning Telegraph   | 27. Time             |
| 8. NY Journal American       | 18. Variety             | 28. Nation           |
| 9. NY World-Telegram and Sun | 19. Billboard           | 29. New Republic     |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle           | 20. Theatre Arts        | 30. New Yorker       |

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-9-13-14-22-25-29.  
So-So: 16-30.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 23. So-So: 6-29.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 13. None: 5-10-11-16-24-25  
 28-29.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28.  
So-So: 16-19-22-23-27. None: 25.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-28-30. None: 13

Kiss Me, Kate-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 16. So-So: 2-22-30

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-8-10-11-15-17-19-23. Con: 1-2-12-  
 26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-14-18. None: 7-9-13-16-20-21-22-24-25.

Peter Pan-Imperial, 4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-13-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.  
None: 5-10-11-13-14-16-22-28-29.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 12 votes. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-  
 29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27. None: 25-28.

Where's Charley?-St.James, 10/12/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-  
 25-26. So-So: 4-27. None: 10-28.

The Wisteria Trees-Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Pro: 15 votes. Con: 2-7-9-10-13-16-22-  
 23-25-26-27-28. So-So: 18-29.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 11-16-29-30. So-So: 26.

